

Hello, I'm Mary Leisenring from Census Academy, and I'm here with Vicki Mack from the American Community Survey office.

Today we will provide a brief overview of the American Community Survey, or ACS for short.

This video will be useful to you if you're new to the ACS, if you're preparing to attend another workshop, webinar, or event to learn how to access ACS data, or if you're a survey respondent who's curious about this survey.

Hi, I'm Vicki Mack from the American Community Survey office. After today's video, you will be able to describe what the ACS is, who uses ACS data, when it began, how easy the data are collected, why one should participate in the ACS, and where you can find more information about the ACS.

What is the ACS?

The ACS is the nation's most current reliable and accessible data source for local statistics on critical planning topics such as age, children, commuting, education, and employment. It's a household survey conducted by the Census Bureau that samples about 3 1/2 million addresses each year.

These data are collected throughout the year and are used to inform the distribution of hundreds of billions of dollars in federal government spending each year. Our estimates covering more than 40 topics support more than 300 federal uses and countless non-federal uses.

The American Community Survey content can be grouped into four main types of characteristics. Social, demographic, economic, and housing. Social characteristics include topics such as disability status, education, and language spoken at home. Demographic characteristics include topics such as sex, age, race, and Hispanic Origin. Economic characteristics include topics such as community and work employment status and income. And housing characteristics include topics such as computer and Internet use, housing costs, and vehicles available.

We have a link to resources to learn more about the topics below the video. Who uses the ACS?

Local planners, businesses, policymakers, grant writers, researchers, and many more use ACS data. Most people probably never think about how local planners use data to know where to target new development or where businesses get the data they need to plan for expansion.

Most probably don't think about where policymakers get the objective data they need to make sure programs are on track, or that local services are keeping pace with their communities changing demographics.

Most people don't know that nonprofit organizations use ACS data in their grant applications. ACS data served the needs of these groups and a variety of other types of data users.

When did the ACS begin?

The first census of the United States was conducted in 1790 and occurred every ten years, with one form being used to collect data from all households through 1930.

From 1940 to 2000, the decennial census, which is the name for the census conducted every ten years, contained a short form to collect data from all households. And the long form that was used to collect data from a sample of households.

In the early 1990s, demand from a wide variety of users for current nationally consistent data led federal government policymakers to consider the feasibility of collecting social, economic, and housing data continuously throughout the decade.

After a period of testing, the ACS was fully implemented in 2005 and began collecting data every year. The Puerto Rico community survey (PRCS) is the equivalent of the ACS in Puerto Rico.

There's 2010; the decennial census is now only a short form that households can complete by mail and now online because the ACS now collects information each year that was once collected by the long form each decade.

Now the ACS is part of the decennial census program, but it's also different from the census. ACS are based on a sample of the population, whereas the census is based on the official count of the population. The ACS collects social, economic, housing, and demographic information, whereas the census collects basic demographics. The ACS produces population and housing characteristics, whereas the census produces housing and population totals.

The excess occurs annually, reflecting a period of time averaging data for 12 months or 16 months. Whereas the census occurs every ten years and reflects a point in time since this date which is April 1st.

Time for a knowledge check.

When was the ACS fully implemented? Was it 1790? 1996? 2004? Or 2005?

If you said 2005, you are correct the ACS was fully implemented after a period of testing from 1996 to 2004.

How are ACS data collected?

ACS data are collected throughout the year through the Internet paper questionnaires and in-person visits from census field representatives.

Why should you participate in the ACS?

People who received the ACS have the responsibility of responding so that the statistical portrait of their community is as complete and accurate as possible. Information from the ACS is critical to state and local agencies. Planners and policymakers use the up-to-date estimates to evaluate the need for new roads, hospitals, schools, senior services, and other basic services. Also, you can rest assured that your information is kept private and protected.

Where can I find more information on the ACS?

If you have questions about the ACS, start with the ACS web page you get there by going to [census.gov/ACS](https://www.census.gov/ACS).

On the left, navigation at the various links to more information about the survey, how to respond to the ACS, ways to access this data, data user stories, and sample questionnaires.

Now let's go to the data link. When you access the various data from the data link, you can access popular tables. Or go directly to the data.census.gov platform to select data on many different topics. And a variety of geographic levels like states, counties, or cities. But before you start searching for statistics, you need to know what data are available for your geographic area of interest.

Our data release page informs data users about when and where ACS data are released every year. The main ACS data products are released about one year after the data are collected. They include the one-year estimates when your supplemental estimates and five-year estimates. ACS one-year estimates, with combined data collected over 12 months, are available for geographic areas with a population of 65,000 or more.

ACS one-year supplemental estimates, which are simplified versions of popular ACS tables, are available for geographic areas with populations of 20,000 or more.

And the five-year estimates with combined data collected over 60 months are available for geographic areas of all sizes down to the granular census tracts and block levels.

You can access the latest release schedule and information for prior years' releases on our website's data release page linked below.

ACS data are available at many geographic levels. ACS data are most commonly needed at the state county place census tract and block group geographic levels.

In this visualization, you can also see the smallest geographic building block is the block group for ACS. You can learn more about the geographic areas for which ACS data are available in the next module of this course and the geography in ACS page linked below or through videos and webinars on Census Academy.

Time for another knowledge check.

When is the ACS conducted?

Is it every month? Every two months? Every five years? Or every ten years?

If you said every month, you are correct. The ACS is conducted every month, and the data are released every year.

Here is what you've learned today!

Today you've learned that the ACS is the nation's most current reliable and accessible data source for local statistics. That the 40-plus topics available in the ACS include: demographic data, commuting, employment income, housing costs, fertility, and more.

The ACS releases one-year estimates, one-year supplemental estimates, and five-year estimates. And that you can access data from the nation-level geography down to the block group-level geography.

We want you to know that we're here to help. Don't forget about the resources at your fingertips. If you find yourself in need of help or information, you can go to the ACS website

email.acso.users.support@census.gov or visit Census Academy to watch related data gems, courses, and webinars.

Thank you to all those who have responded to the ACS, which help our communities thrive!